

Bob Dylan: moustache all his own work.

# Joker Man

*Facing old age with a smile.*

**Bob Dylan**  
Love And Theft

AT THE TURN of the 1980s, his most accident-prone decade by furlongs, Bob Dylan released Oh Mercy. His fans rejoiced, the world spun off its axis, and then he brought out the pretty threadbare Under The Red Sky. For some, the disappointment positively ached. That turn of events is bound to inform expectations vis-à-vis his 30th studio album: given that 1997's Time Out Of Mind was so good, pessimists may be bracing themselves for anticlimax. Thankfully, this is little short of a treat: a rambunctious dance through the more sepia-tinted corners of US musical history, split – broadly speaking – between 12-bar R&B and (no, really) swing ballads. On both counts, its author does rather well.

If Time Out Of Mind tended to find Dylan staring into the abyss, here he seems to have concluded that, when faced with the travails of late middle age, humour is the better option. "Everybody get ready to lift up your glasses and say/I'm a-standing on the table, proposin' a toast to decay," goes the rockabilly-esque Summer Days. One verse later comes this: "She said, Ya can't repeat the past/I said, Ya

can't? Whaddya mean ya can't – of course ya can!" The lines, Dylanologists may be intrigued to know, are from The Great Gatsby. On the swing numbers, things get funnier. It's only Dylan's lived-in voice and sheer presence that lets him get away with some of the lines here. Take Poor Boy: "Man came to the door/I said, For whom are you lookin'/Said, Your wife/I said, she's busy in the kitchen, cookin'". Really, who needs scansion?

Such tomfoolery apart, there are two strait-laced songs that instantly join the roll-call of Dylan classics. Mississippi could sit comfortably on 1989's esteemed Oh Mercy. The stunning Sugar Baby, meanwhile, is a message to an estranged lover, somewhere between a tired final goodbye and a sardonic put-down – in that sense, it's not entirely misplaced to think of it in the same terms as Idiot Wind from Blood On The Tracks. Consider Love And Theft in the context of its predecessor, and you come to a welcome conclusion. Bob Dylan has followed an excellent album with a very good one. And that hasn't happened since 1976. ★★★★★  
John Harris

## Standout Tracks

Mississippi  
Poor Boy  
Sugar Baby

**Joe Henry**  
Scar

IF 1996's exquisite Trampoline couldn't elevate Joe Henry's fortunes then nothing can. Still, with this eighth album, Madonna's sister's husband shows little sign of compromise. Further away than ever from the Jayhawks-assisted organic rock for which he acquired a cult following, Scar ropes in trumpeter/saxophonist Ornette Coleman and enfant terrible jazz pianist Brad Mehldau to mess up the thoughtfully twisted lyrics. The snail's-paced Richard Pryor Addresses A Tearful Nation and strung-out title cut may tax the non-jazz enthusiast but Henry functions perfectly elsewhere. Mean Flower, Stop (written for his sister-in-law) and Edgar Bergen – the latter's orchestral swoops and pattering drums fleshing out his finest vocal yet – delivering perfect snapshots of what Henry does best: bone-dry storytelling by a younger, less ruined Tom Waits. Exceptional. ★★★★★  
Mark Blake

## Like this? Try these...

Bruce Cockburn *Charity Of Night* (eurodisc, 1997)  
Mark Hollis *Mark Hollis* (polygram, 1988)  
David Gray *White Ladder* (parlophone, 1999)

**John Hiatt**  
The Tiki Bar Is Open

That tricky (gulp) 16th album from cult US songmeister perennial.

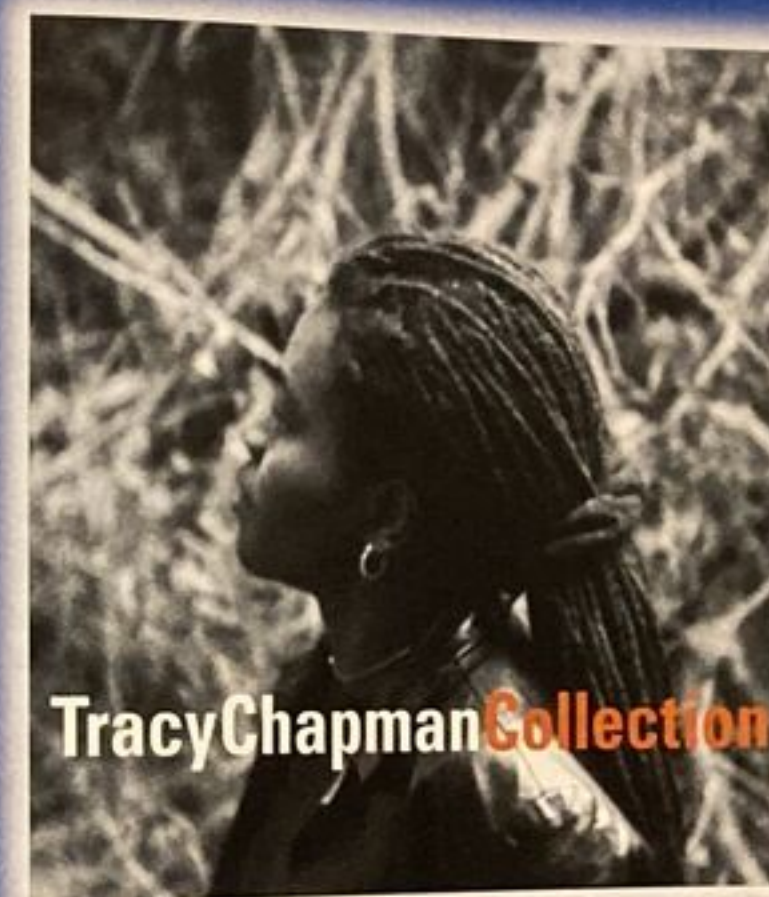
A pedigree songwriter whose clients have included everybody from Iggy Pop to Conway Twitty, John Hiatt's name means little more now than when he started in the mid-'70s. While The Tiki Bar Is Open won't change anything, long haul Hiatt-watchers will have no cause for complaint. After last year's drumless Crossing Muddy Waters, he's reunited with his old road outfit, The Goners (including ace guitarist Sonny Landreth), to deliver a rollicking bar band set that blends characteristically picaresque rockers with tender ballads before signing-off in fine style with the spacey Farther Stars. Wry, worldly and with a kick like a satanic mule. It's never too late to get acquainted, you know. ★★★★★  
Peter Kane



Like this? Try these... The Mills Brothers *The Very Best Of The Mills Brothers* (eurodisc, 1997) *Pete Wee Crayton* *Blues Guitar Magic* (eurodisc, 1997) *Various* *Red Hot: The Very Best Of Sun Rockabilly* (eurodisc, 1997)

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# new albums

## kd lang

Live By Request

WARNER BROS 9362481082

The country star plays her songs live and, well, by request.

kd lang's first live album also serves as her first greatest hits release, recorded, as it was, for a US TV series which invites fans to send in requests. The resultant 14 tracks include the inevitable Constant Craving, Three Cigarettes and, from last year's excellent Invinible Summer LP, Summer Fling. If the sheer quality of the songs is a given, their recorded performance is a disappointment. The drums are often too loud, odd instruments push themselves to the fore at awkward moments and, perhaps spurred on by the enthusiastic applause, lang veers towards exuberant over-singing. Once or twice, though, as on the tender Trail Of Broken Hearts and the stomping Miss Chatelaine, material and performance get it together just right. ★★★

David Roberts

## Bill Laswell

Divine Light

COLUMBIA/LEGACY CO. 502279 9

The avant rocker's remixed, reordered vision of early '70s Carlos Santana.

Bassist/producer Bill Laswell earned his über-muso stripes long ago, but it was his 1998 Miles Davis project, Panthalassa, that showed what he could do when invited to remix and reorder historic recordings. Music from Carlos Santana's 1973 Love Devotion Surrender project with guitarist John McLaughlin and his 1974 Illuminations with Alice Coltrane (John's missus) gets the Laswell treatment this time. All three musicians were devotees of guru Sri Chinmoy, and spiritual themes abound (in a post-John Coltrane, Western-harp-Eastern-percussion way). But Laswell's sense of structure is extraordinary, and he adds layers of excitement and intrigue that not even the musicians involved could have imagined. ★★★★★

Linton Chiswick

## Love As Laughter

Sea To Shining Sea

Skewed rock classicism from Beck collaborator and pals.

It's cruelly symptomatic of Love As Laughter's position in the US alt-rock firmament (that frontman Sam Jayne works as a washer-up in a chi-chi Seattle burrito restaurant favoured by the city's rock glitterati). But while Jayne has spent the last six years up to his elbows in

suds, his band has also been knocking out some invigoratingly amped-up music. Encompassing three decades of scuzz-rock cool, Sea To Shining Sea circles biker rock and black-hearted Velvet Underground grooves. Single Temptation Island makes like AC/DC playing tin-foil guitars, while The Square even resurrects raga-rock. Perhaps the time has come to give up the day job. ★★★★★

Pot Long

## Nick Lowe

The Convincer

PROPER PRCO 012

Basher still telling it like it is, 12th time around.

Nick Lowe has been going forever, long enough to make the art of making records seem as natural as drawing breath. Containing 10 originals plus Johnny Rivers' Poor Side Of Town and Arthur Prysock's Only A Fool Breaks His

Own Heart. The Convincer slots in smoothly behind 1998's Dig My Mood. The settings are understated, the vocals conversational, while the songs, as filtered through the rueful eyes of this fiftysomething Englishman, gaze lovingly back to the glory days of Stax, Brill Building pop and Johnny Cash ruling the country roost. As amiably soured as ever, I'm A Mess, Homewrecker and Lately I've Let Things Slide all hit

that unique Lowe spot. ★★★

Peter Kane

## Cheb Mami

Dellali

VIRGIN COVR 147

He's Sting's Algerian mate, you know...

Even fervent internationalists might balk at this latest concoction from the self-styled Prince Of Rai. With production duties split

between Nile Rodgers and Nitin Sawhney, plus a guest list that includes Sting, Ziggy Marley, Chet Baker, the English Symphony Orchestra and London Community Gospel Choir, Dellali sounds like a last, desperate attempt to reach an audience beyond the Parisian suburbs. Le Chic, anyone? Thought so. A bit funky here, a touch of reggae there, it's all so damned shiny and eager-to-

please. Hardly surprising that the best track, Tzazae, should also be the most traditional. ★★

Peter Kane

## Maxwell

Now

COLUMBIA 497454

Third studio album from New York's classic soulster.

If Urban Hang Suite was about the past and Embrya the future, Now is

Maxwell with feet firmly in the present. A much more focussed and funky set than Embrya, it still features mostly slow songs (including Kate Bush's A Woman's Work) about the emotions and uncertainties of love, but with a more carnal element and an upbeat party ending. The arrangements too are still snaky, sinewy and delay-laden, weaving in unusual touches, from Memphis-style brass and clarinet to harp and banjo, alongside Maxwell's impassioned vulnerability. The more urgent numbers recall early Prince in their syncopation, rock guitars and suggestive falsetto, while the naggingly catchy dance groove of Noone might yet see Maxwell cracking the UK singles charts. ★★★

Ian Crahan

## Macy Gray

The Id

EPC 50409 2

WHEN THE Miseducation Of Lauryn Hill sold millions, it was with a sense of inevitability. As a beautiful member of the most popular hip hop act of the mid '90s, Hill was assured success. Not so Macy Gray. An unknown with a voice that suggested she had sucked helium from a party balloon, and an unconventional image famously mocked by Ali G at the Brits, Gray defied music industry logic to sell seven million copies of her resolutely old-school 1999 debut On How Life Is. Unlike Hill, Gray did not object when white audiences bought her album in the kind of numbers currently enjoyed by her everyman namesake David.

For her second album, Macy Gray has called in some big names including producer Rick Rubin, Red Hot Chili Peppers guitarist John Frusciante, organist Billy Preston (a veteran of both Beatles and Rolling Stones sessions), nu-soul divas Erykah Badu and Angie Stone, and Wimbledon-born ex-con rapper Slick Rick. The result is an album rich in texture and guaranteed to top shopping lists come Christmas.

As any good shrink will attest, this album's title refers to Freud's theory of the pleasure-seeking subconscious, but Gray's Bridget Jones constituency have nothing to fear. The Id is business as usual. The first single Sweet Baby co-stars Badu and moves as slinkily as Gray's breakthrough hit I Try. Likewise, Boo and Harry echo the quietly horny soul of her debut.

It is only when she tries something a little different that Macy comes unstuck. Sexual Revolution, a Prince-inspired disco number, is the least sexy song about sex since WASP's Animal (Fuck Like A Beast). Worse, Oblivion is a cod-Broadway showpiece that makes Meat Loaf sound understated. On these two tracks Gray is trying too hard, and needlessly so. There is enough subtle invention in the freaky funk of Related To A Psychopath and the gospel/hip hop crossover of Hey Young World II (reminiscent of Jay-Z's Hard Knock Life) to keep her music fresh. And there are still just enough seductive songs to give Lauryn Hill a few sleepless nights. ★★★

Paul Elliott

### Standout Tracks

Sweet Baby  
Related To A  
Psychopath  
Harry

## Mazarin

A Tall Tale Storyline

ROCKET GIRL 294P

Buddhist-influenced prettiness from Philly's leading psychedelics.

Peter Tork lookalike and Philadelphia resident Quentin Stolz - yes, his real name - follows the gorgeous 1999 debut Watch It Happen with a more collaborative effort bringing on board producer Brian McPhear, Aspera Ad Astra's Matt Worth and Lenola drummer Sean Byrne. Opening track Go Home reflects Stolz's trip to Thailand earlier this year, with the purity of Buddhist bells covered by layers of harmony and acoustic guitar. There's similar startling beauty in songs such as Suicide Will Make You Happy, an acid-tinged ballad reminiscent of the bittersweet single Wheats, assuring the miserable that "You don't have to pretend/that suicide will make you happy". Just lovely. ★★★★★

Anne Mullee

## David Mead

Mine And Yours

RCA 07045 49327

New York tunesmith steps up from carrying own guitar on last year's solo tour.

Promoting his first album last year, David Mead took the young Paul Simon route, travelling the UK by train like a proper folk troubadour. But that image doesn't represent the gifts he displays on this follow-up, Mine And Yours. Although his sweet, high voice, which slips smoothly in and out of falsetto, hints at Simon or even Thom Yorke, the essence of Mead is flowing, romantic pop tunes. Given a proper band, he pours out lovelorn laments and swooning paeans: fitting between "I sleep alone with the radio on" (on Comfort) and "Could you be my girl tonight?" (on What I Want To Do). However, since this is nice yet nothing new or particularly commercial, his best hope of getting rich might involve flogging the songs to some ambitious Brit boy band. ★★★

Phil Sutcliffe

# Shrink Wrapped

There's always been a Freudian sex-Broadway element to her music.



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